

# The Demise of a Critical Institution of Economic Geography in Japan

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## I. Critical Geography Defined

‘Critical geography’ is a term with dual connotations. First, it is relative, for the act of criticism can take place only where the target to be criticised or the established paradigm exists. Here, the nature of being critical is an inverse image of the establishment and therefore in constant flux reflecting shifting paradigms. When Hartshornian chorography was the paradigm, any attempt to criticise it with the term ‘exceptionalism’ was critical and revolutionary. Once the competing paradigm ascends to the throne of orthodoxy, however, the role turns and new challengers to this new orthodoxy arise.

A corollary to this connotation emerges when two different kinds of ‘orthodoxy’ are taken into account. In our academic circles, orthodoxy can have political or intellectual context, or sometimes both. Being critical can therefore not only mean challenging the intellectual paradigm, but also challenging some forms of political domination of the national geography school or an individual professor engaging in nepotism or discouraging academic freedom, particularly among graduate students and young scholars who seek favourable recommendation letters and tenure evaluations. In Japanese academia, where Confucian values still predominate to a certain degree, the role of critical geographers therefore is to challenge the political orthodoxy of their professional associations or senior professors who tend to bring the existing paradigm into ossification and obstruct the sound development of scholarship in geography.

Second, ‘critical’ has an absolute connotation, for the act of criticism is a component of a much larger political endeavour to change the current unjust, unequal, and war-prone capitalist mode of production into an alternative mode of production that is more just, egalitarian, and peaceful. Critical geographers act jointly to achieve this overall political goal. Since this political and social revolution of society and economy requires scientific and logical analysis of the existing mode of production, a nomothetic theoretical body which is normally called Marxism is to be placed at the base of critical geography.

When these two connotations coincide in reality, the momentum for the rise of critical geography becomes all the more strong. The crises in capitalism have thus had the habit of triggering critical approaches in geography: the Vietnam War in North America, and the Great Depression of 1929-30 in Japan. Both in North America and Japan this movement ended up with attempts to introduce a more critical and nomothetic theoretical framework into geography.

Taking into consideration the loaded complexity of the term ‘critical geography,’ I adopt the term in a more flexible manner. Depending on the context, different connotations of the term may receive stronger emphasis than others.

## II. Japanese Critical Geography: The Heritage of More than Two Generations

Surprising as it sounds, critical geography, with its history of only one generation of scholars in the English-speaking countries, has a heritage that has lasted seven decades in Japan.

Amidst the raging militarism and suppression of academic freedom, Marxism attained its zenith in Japan in the 1930s, marked by the completion of the first full Japanese translation of *Das Kapital*, and the publication of a comprehensive Marxian analysis of the structure of the pre-war Japanese economy that later became seminal. This gave impetus to the translation of several geography books published in the Soviet Union and Germany. The Stalinist influence was obvious, in its sweeping disavowal of geographical determinism, which was regarded by the communist regime there as one of the major ideological impediments to the 'remodelling of nature' and space. This nevertheless gave a decisive kick-off to critical geography in Japan.

Kawanishi was one of the principal figures. He translated Wittfogel's main work on *dialektische Wechselwirkungstheorie* (dialectic theory of human-environment interaction, 1929), which was later adopted by geographers in the critical camp in Japan as a basic frame of reference until it was criticised by Kawashima (1952). Yet, Kawanishi's weakness in putting lopsided emphasis on the labour process was carried on into his new research agenda, the critical appraisal of location theories. Kawanishi's alternative treatment of location theory covered two aspects: the interpretation of industrial production as a labour process, and the examination of variegated locational dynamism at different stages of capitalist development (Kawanishi, 1936) where he again left out the valorisation process in favour of technological aspects.

In the 1940s, his conceptual weakness degenerated amidst attempts to 'academically' legitimise the Japanese militarist expansion in WWII and the Japanese military predominance over the Asian Pacific, through the propagation of the 'Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere,' drawing upon the notions of geopolitics (Kawanishi, 1942). He thus became not only the first critical geographer who converted into supporting the national political orthodoxy, but also the first to give in to the orthodoxy. Indeed, "the history of geography clearly reflects the evolution of empire" (Godlewska and Smith eds., 1994: p. 2), and critical geography offered no way to escape from becoming a victim unless one became consciously aware of the danger of co-optation.

## III. The Foundation of a Critical Institution for Economic Geography: the Japan Association of Economic Geographers (JAEG)

The position of geographers within academic orthodoxy immediately after the war was best manifested in the presidential address of the Association of Japanese Geographers (AJG) at its 1948 annual meeting: "Warfare has always enriched geographical knowledge." Yet Japan's defeat in WWII shattered the dream, bringing Japanese geographers back into the state's land development projects (Tsujimura, 1948). The *Geographical Review of Japan* (*Chirigaku Hyōron*, *GRJ* hereafter), the official journal of the AJG, boasted, "Geography has gradually become recognised as a practical science among many walks of life, as manifested in its adoption by the government sector" (*GRJ*, 21:6, 1948).

It was in this academic and social ambience that the critically-minded Japanese geographers made their first attempt to organise themselves. This was perhaps the first attempt on the globe to establish a 'counter geography institution' as an antithesis to the national school. It was initially formed as the 'Geography Study Group' for human geography and the 'Association for Geological Collaboration' for physical geography, both divisions of the Association of Democratic Scientists, a movement that had associations with the Japan Communist Party. On this institutional base, the critical geographers "turned their back on the existing authority and order, and...struggled to reform the AJG by campaigning for candidates [in favour

of the critical positions] as councillors; while they simultaneously poised themselves for the foundation of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers” (Kazamaki, 1998: p. 72).

At the 1951 autumnal AJG meeting, these critical geographers hosted a roundtable titled ‘Human Geography as a Social Science.’ Ishida (1952), who had postulated that geography should be of “nomothetic nature as one of the social sciences,” chaired the session. He claimed that, in conducting research in geography, “theories of general social science have to be assumed,” and rejected exceptionalism by stating, “Enumerating the facts from field surveys or descriptive regional geography does not in itself amount to the category of ‘research’ in social sciences.” This torrent further strengthened into establishing the Economic Geography Forum, then the Economic Geography Study Group, and ultimately into the Japan Association of Economic Geographers (JAEG, *Keizai Chiri Gakkai*) in 1954. They used the word ‘economic geography’ as a surrogate for critical or Marxist geography to make it more palatable to the general public.

Sato, professor of economic geography at Hitotsubashi University and who later assumed the first presidency of the JAEG, declared its aims and objectives as follows:

We hereby establish the Japan Association of Economic Geographers, aiming at creating, developing and propagating economic geography as a social science, by elaborating the theory of economic geography as well as conducting research on real issues of economic geography, incorporating research outcomes without limiting ourselves to the pigeon-holes of the disciplines, and through the collaboration of our members engaging in free and lively criticism. (JAEG, ‘General Index’).

The themes of the first four meetings were, in chronological order, ‘On Economic Geography,’ ‘On Regions,’ ‘The Fundamental Problems of Economic Geography,’ and ‘Agriculture and Industry or Urban-Rural Interregional Relationships.’ The inaugural issue of the journal of JAEG, *The Annals of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers (Keizai Chirigaku Nempō, AAEG hereafter)* published in 1954, contained the following articles: ‘Materialism and Geography,’ ‘The Methodological Development of the Analysis of Industrial Areas: as a Process to Recognise the Problematic from Critical Economic Geography,’ ‘The Allocation of Agricultural Productive Forces in the Soviet Union,’ ‘Measuring Transport Orientation of Industrial Location based on the Virtual Weight Calculation Method,’ and ‘Location of Electro-chemical Industry.’ A review dealt with a book published in the People’s Republic of China on stock farming. The strong critical and theoretical inclination among the members at the early stage of the JAEG was clear.

The second issue contained a paper by Kawashima that later became seminal. He set up a new agenda for economic geography to formulate a nomothetic law along Marxist lines on ‘spatial distribution of economic phenomena and localities’ and their ‘development and demise’ (Kawashima, 1955: p. 9), rejecting the neo-classical approach in explaining this in favour of historical materialism, by claiming (pp. 11-12):

...an attempt to explain the production of regional economic structure drawing upon the law of marginal productivity equilibration is as empty and nonsensical as claiming that ‘it is nothing but competition based on liberalist principles that produces regional economic structure.’ In explaining the production of regional economic structures, it is self-evident whether economic geography should be pursued along the lines of an abstract principle as it were of management technique, or a more realistic law of social and economic theories.

He concluded the paper by proclaiming (p. 17), “both the overcoming of localities and the

transcendence of class are the major targets that humans must and can achieve. The most fundamental task of economic geography is to identify the relation between these two intertwined targets (i.e. localities and class).”

The same issue contained another more philosophically oriented article (Okuda, 1955). It attempted an “ontological discourse of the dialectical world as the object of science in general,” and postulated several propositions, which the author later synthesized into a book presenting his own conceptions of critical geography (1969).

#### **IV. The Progress of Critical Geography in Japan in the 1950s and 60s**

In the initial years of the JAEG, attempts were made among Japanese critical geographers to counter the conventional exceptionalism prevalent in the dominating national school and to establish a theoretical body serving the conceptual core of the critical movement. Their mentor was Stalin, the absolute authority before which all left-wing people trembled. Kamozaawa (1954) proclaimed in *GRJ*, “Upon the gradual transition from socialism to communism, the Soviet academic circle, in drawing upon the epoch-making paper of Stalin, achieved publication of papers that further promoted economic geography,” and asked Japanese geographers to “study the works of Stalin thoroughly.” A review by Watanabe (1955) appearing also in *GRJ* naïvely praised the inroads of Russian-managed plants, which were the consequence of the USSR’s forcible annexation of the Baltic countries by Stalin. Topics common among Western critical geographers a generation later, such as the concepts of ethnicity, minorities, or the question of democracy in socialism, were largely absent in the arguments of the Japanese critical geographers during this period. Stalinism being so rigid, attacks upon conventional geographers became more dogmatic, and thus over time deprived Japanese critical geographers of fresh and flexible conceptual creativity.

In *GRJ*, Kamozaawa (1955) condemned a paper on ‘the population centre of gravity,’ as having abstracted social relations and ignored unemployment in ‘the population,’ thereby “leaving out the historical and social natures.” It is easy to make this sort of sweeping denial of the conventional school, but the harder part lies beyond-in the creation of their own theory, into which Japanese critical geographers had rarely ventured (Mizuoka, 1996). The 1956 issue of *AAEG* published two articles (Akamine, 1956; and Sato, 1956) reviewing the historiography of critical geography in Japan. Ohara (1957) studied the development and demise of an old cotton town, Lowell, Massachusetts, incorporating historical materialist perspectives on environmental concepts. Yet their potential to create concepts unique to critical geography was hardly present in these works.

Lacking their own critical theories, economic geographers’ practise gradually shifted into exceptionalism. They described problem regions with exposés, drawing upon ready-made conceptions available outside geography. Some advocates of critical economic geography had explicitly endorsed this research orientation. Ohara (1950) stressed the descriptive nature of geography, while denouncing location theory as a core of the discipline. Iizuka, another contemporary, claimed, “the function of geography lies by definition in the descriptive or regional aspect” (Iizuka, 1952: p.117).

The study of disasters was a good case in point. Disasters, by nature, having strong associations with the physical environment, and the capitalist development of power sources and deforestation often having an adverse affect on the livelihood of the poor more than the rich, made such studies an apt agenda for critical geographers in pursuit of social relevance. Here they drew upon the concepts common among contemporary critical civil engineers under Maoist influence, who valued the traditional wisdom of the local peasants more in disaster prevention than Western technologies (Akamine, 1960;and Ishii, 1960).

The studies of developing countries were another case. Many existing paradigms and preceding

research done by non-geographers were readily available, and the application of an existing framework, the dependency theory *inter alia*, was capable of producing research that normally put blame on dominating imperialist powers and gave support to oppressed ethnic groups and the poor. The *AAEG* published articles by Kamozaawa (1957) on Turkey and Central America, Koga (1957) on India, and Ōiwakawa (1964) on Palestine.

Other approaches by Japanese critical geographers included the study of industrial geography with emphasis on capital-labour relations. A group consisting of a small number of critically-minded industrial geographers was evolving in connection with this research agenda.

This trend was eventually consolidated in the seminal *A Lecture Notebook of Economic Geography* (Kamozaawa 1960), of which original plans had appeared in the *AAEG* (1955) five years before. In this book, Kamozaawa explicitly asked (pp. 15-16) critical geographers to 'borrow' theories from other social sciences, then to apply them to idiosyncratic field studies. He thus took the position of endorsing the 'passive consumption' of aspatial concepts from the social sciences, and legitimized exceptionalist field practises among critical geographers.

Nevertheless, several significant attempts to break away from this exceptionalism emerged from the second half of the 1960s to the early 1970s. Some critical geographers, if not many in number, strove hard to revive creativity in theoretical concepts unique to critical geography. Indeed, during this brief interlude, which lasted for less than a decade, critical geography in Japan enjoyed its heyday, when Japanese geographers came to the fore, perhaps along with their French counterparts, among all the geographers on the globe striving along critical lines.

A series of articles containing more creative conceptualisations of critical geography appeared in the 1966 volume of *GRJ*. They attempted to establish contextual concepts of society-space or space-place interfaces, an agenda that became common among critical geographers in the English-speaking countries decades later (Ōta, 1966; Okuyama, 1966; Ishida, 1966; Moritaki, 1966; Fujita, 1971). (For details, see Mizuoka, Mizuuchi, Hisatake, Tsutsumi, and Fujita (2005): pp. 458-459).

Nevertheless, some articles that appeared in *GRJ* in this period still remained exceptionalist. Aono (1967), for example, published detailed field studies of the textile industry in Osaka, throwing in radical terms such as 'monopoly capital' and 'union-management co-operation under the social-democratic line,' with little conceptual significance unique to geography.

In spite of these efforts, the wane of the critical stance in the JAEG camp at large had already been noted among economic geographers taking a clearer Marxist line. Moritaki (1966: p. 15) expressed his concern as follows:

...some 'Marxist' economic geographers assume that economic geography must be a branch of 'theoretical' social science, omitting all phases immediately concerned with the natural environment from the study content. They try to reduce the field of economic geography even by arbitrary 'co-operation' with various schools based on capitalistic economies. Such tendencies deserve criticism as involving an unscientific distortion of the nature of economic geography.

This criticism targeted first some geographers in the JAEG who had been trying to compromise between Marxism and neo-classical regional economics; and second, scholars who attempted to throw away human-nature relationships from the agenda of critical geography in favour of the 'concept of region.'

Ueno, the author of *The Milestone of Economic Geography* (1968), wrote *The Ultimate Origin of Chorography* in 1972, which responded positively to Moritaki. This book, attempting to integrate Marxist and humanistic approaches into one theoretical frame of critical geography, marked a significant achievement in the post-war

critical heritage of Japanese geography. Drawing upon the interpretations of Heideggerian phenomenology by two Japanese philosophers, Watsuji (1933) and Hiromatsu (1969), Ueno attempted to explain something objective as intersubjective, in interpreting the produced nature. (For a more detailed account of Ueno's contribution, see Mizuoka, Mizuuchi, Hisatake, Tsutsumi and Fujita (2005): pp. 459-461).

## V. The Divide: The Year 1973 and After

The year 1973 marked the turning point for the post-WWII economy as well as for critical geographies both in English-speaking countries and Japan. In the case of geography, however, the directions they took were totally opposite to one another.

The Japanese counterpart of Harvey's *Social Justice and the City* was Toshifumi Yada's article titled "On Economic Geography" (1973). Yada had originally been a critical economic geographer specialising in coal-mining studies. He denounced the government's policy which had attempted to scrap the coal-mining regions after the influx of petroleum into Japan, claiming that it aimed to "support the large enterprises and eliminate small companies" (1967: p.19), and damned the "monopoly capital exploiting and abusing domestic resources on the pretext of 'regional development' and 'urbanisation'."

In his 1973 paper, later incorporated into *The Regional Structure of Post-war Japanese Capitalism* (Moritaki and Nohara eds., 1975) as the theoretical introduction, Yada jumbled up past Japanese geographers who made considerable contributions to critical scholarship, including Iizuka, Kamozaawa, Kawashima and Ueno, into the 'economic chorography school,' which had in fact never existed but was imagined by Yada himself.

Yada criticized this 'school' as meddling with futile ideographic approaches. The facts did not necessarily support his claim, however. Although exceptionalism was a significant stream among Japanese critical geographers by then, and Iizuka and Kamozaawa had indeed advocated explicitly for it, Ueno's notable theoretical achievement discussed above proved to be quite to the contrary.

Yada's point was to introduce the national spatial scale more explicitly into the research of exceptionalist critical geographers. The alternative that Yada thus put forward was what he called the 'regional structure conception (*chiiki kōzō ron*).' According to his own definition (1990: pp. 15-16), "*chiiki kōzō* (regional structure) is the system of the regional division of labour of a national economy," which is "in principle determined by the industrial structure, or the system of social division of labour." He gave two elements that form *chiiki kōzō*: "location of various sectors and functions that constitute the industrial structure" and "regional [economic] circuits that unfold based on these locations" (2000: p. 300). Using this concept, he set out to identify relatively autonomous economic regions within Japan. Recently he has asserted that *chiiki kōzō* could "...put forward logic to understand macroeconomic spatial systems based on spatial behaviours of corporations at the micro level" (2000: p. 301).

One could easily come to wonder, however, how the identification of autonomous economic regions can be the agenda of critical geography. It is something more homologous to market area analysis, central-place theory, or shift-share analysis. They would work better with neo-classical economic geography than with the critical perspective. In pursuit of identifying the spatial system in Japan, Marxist concepts were thus tacitly substituted with neo-classical ones. Space was thus brought into geography at the cost of leaving the title 'critical' behind.

Armed with his *chiiki kōzō ron* with this theoretical defect, Yada organised the *Chiiki Kōzō Kenkyūkai* (Group for Regional Structure Research) with Kitamura, a conventional industrial geographer, being the figurehead, and a score of other economic geographers as a core. Many younger economic and social geographers once enthusiastic for the critical orientation were lured into the Group, partly due to Yada's close association with the political line of the Japan Communist Party at that time, wherein its critical nature

was taken for granted without scrutiny.

The *Kenkyūkai* thus eventually grew into an influential faction in the Japanese geographers' circle. Having many conventionalists enticed into the Group made the *Chiiki Kōzō Kenkyūkai* conceptually more compromising towards them. On the other hand, it canalised the younger geographers who had been in the genuinely critical camp into more conventional or neo-classical tenets.

The process of forming a faction in academic politics took place behind the scenes. When I was a graduate student, I was invited to a 'workshop' reviewing *The Regional Structure of Post-war Japanese Capitalism*. The 'workshop' was held in Urawa, now a district of Saitama to the north of Tokyo, in early 1977. After the formal session, the 'confidential' portion of the gathering began, where 'strategic politics' to organise the research activities of economic geography were arranged and agreed upon. At the end of the workshop, I was told not to disclose the existence of this workshop to anyone else.

This method of organising a faction has much similarity to the organisational principle of a Leninist-Stalinist-type communist party. According to this party principle, only one 'vanguard' party, structured along the monolithic principle of 'democratic centralism,' can claim political orthodoxy, which is to be exercised by the omnipotent 'great leader' who commands all the social actions. Here, various organisations engaging in social movements are virtually placed under its control through a party faction, acting as the 'conveyor belt' of the party principle. While critical geography in North America emerged from the stage of empiricism, and moved towards attempts "to construct a new, philosophical base for human geography" (Peet 1977: p. 20), the Japanese counterpart degenerated into mere politics in academic circles.

After all, Yada's accusations against the past practises of critical geographers of 'economic chorography' were meant more to be a political manoeuvre to set up his own faction than a serious academic attempt. The political power thus exercised managed to undermine the intellectual power which had been prevalent among the circle of critically-minded economic geographers until 1972.

## VI. The Crisis of Critical Geography in Japan

Japanese critical geography suffered a severe setback, as the *chiiki kōzō* faction failed to come up with a research agenda to formulate a critical theory of space as in the West. This manifested itself in several instances that have taken place lately among the geographers closely associated with the JAEG.

A Japanese translation of the third edition of *Location in Space: Theoretical Perspectives in Economic Geography* appeared in 1997 (transl. by Ito *et al.*). The original book by Lloyd and Dicken has been a standard textbook of economic geography and location theories for undergraduate students. Its third edition, published in 1990, was unique in drawing heavily upon the critical concepts of space developed in the English-speaking countries, especially in Part II. Unfortunately, many of the Japanese translators could not render fundamental terms and phrases of social and spatial concepts into Japanese correctly: 'mode of production,' a basic theoretical building block of historical materialism, dropped out, and 'heterogeneous space,' an essential assumption of Weberian location theory, was wrongly translated as 'homogeneous space,' just to give a couple of examples. These mistranslations suggested that the translators, many of whom had been associated with the *chiiki kōzō* faction in some way or other, were incapable of understanding both the spatial logic and social theories contained in the original text. Some mistakes were corrected in their revised translation, but not all of them.

Naito's criticism of Yamamoto (1997), the successor of Yada at Hosei University and the director of the executive board of the JAEG at that time, was another case in point. Naito, who had once been a JAEG executive board member but had quit the JAEG altogether a couple of years before, contributed his

paper on multicultural and multiethnic society to *GRJ*, the journal published by the orthodox national school and once the target of criticism among the geographers affiliated with the JAEG. Naito called into question Yamamoto's amenability to German authority and lack of robustness in his observations on Turkish immigrants in Germany:

Yamamoto emphasised that institutional discrimination against foreign residents has a lower profile in the present migrant issues [in Germany]. However, this is wrong. Even though many of the local governments exhibit tolerant attitudes, the Turks are still reluctant to seek improvement of their legal rights, which are restrictively regulated by the federal government. Most of the Turks in Germany have become aware that their difficulties in achieving equal rights as German citizens are the result of an institutionalised alienation whose ideological basis is a concept of the German nation (Naito, 1997: p. 766).

This manifested a clear change of the scene, indicating more freedom in the acceptance of academic pluralism in the *GRJ*, while keeping a position closer to the political orthodoxy in the JAEG camps.

In the meantime, Yada himself had tacitly converted his political orientation away from the critical and snuggled up to the political authority of the state apparatus. He began to associate with the conservative and sometimes corrupt LDP-led government, by actively serving on a number of government committees promoting national land development and urbanisation policies. The younger, once critical geographers nonetheless stayed loyal to him, largely tempted by nepotistic and collusive motives in being offered, for example, university positions.

Gradually, this faction came to dominate the executive board of the once critical JAEG. Reflecting this, the national and divisional meetings of the JAEG became increasingly geared to the neo-liberalist corporate culture of the local states working hard to market their regions to global capitalism by flattering national and local policy makers, capitalising upon vested interest associated closely with the conservative members of the Diet. The JAEG has hosted a series of meetings dealing with regional development policies, with Yada playing a significant role in many of them. The 1998 national conference, organised by Yada's close ally Yamakawa, was on the theme "Deregulation and Regional Economy." In a symposium at this conference, Yada (1998) uncritically gave a briefing on the main features of the most recent national land development projects focused on the 'National Land Axes' "from the viewpoint of those who participated in formulating and deciding on the project." Yada (1998: pp. 102-103) commented:

We should no longer use the concept of balanced growth to legitimise mere redistribution of public investment and income....The notion that infrastructure provision is a fundamental lever to promote equal opportunity in geographical terms is, I believe, based on the idea that furnishing an environment should facilitate easy access to state-of-the-art services and the enjoyment of short nature trips, regardless of residents' socioeconomic status. There is no need to provide every single local state with uniform sets of services. With transportation and other networks well-equipped, those who value proximity to a city and enjoyment of urban services should opt to live in the city; whilst those who prefer to indulge themselves in nature with only occasional trips to the city might opt for living in the 'multi-natural living zone.' Once these places are well-developed, the residents are then left to their own choices. This new land development project indicates a shift to the concept where the burden of promoting the region falls on the shoulder of the residents.



One can discern a neo-liberal tone with a concept akin to Tiebout's 'voting with one's feet,' as well as a contempt for egalitarianism in spatial planning.

## VII. The Demise of the JAEG under Neo-liberalism

It has been touted that neo-liberalism entails democracy, yet it actually brings about a kind of democracy that 'votes with dollar bills' or that 'votes with one's feet.' Democracy through political representation or participation is rather suppressed, or there is constantly some 'crisis situation' identified so that everyone will be driven into some institutional form which will force people into neo-liberal economic and social structures.

This paradox of neo-liberalism manifested itself in the 'constitutional reform' of the JAEG, which abolished the system of the free and direct election of JAEG officers. The idea behind it was expressed in a draft amendment proposed by Hiroshi Matsubara, one of the loyal disciples of Yada who served in the position of chief executive of the *AAEG* for the 2004-2005 term. The retiring executive board members would produce a candidate list for the executive board with the exact same number as the number of seats open; then this list would be presented to the general members who could do virtually nothing but rubber-stamp it. In this system, reminiscent of fascist or Stalinist regimes, it would be easy for the *chiiki kōzō* faction to perpetuate its domination of the JAEG.

The general assembly of the JAEG held in May 1999 adopted a milder version than that proposed by Matsubara: it deprived the general assembly of the right to approve or deny the list of members of the executive board, who should instead be picked out of the elected councillors 'by consultation' behind closed doors. During the debate that lasted for three hours, Yamakawa, then chairperson of the general assembly, attempted to dismiss the right of the opposition to propose a more democratic counter-proposal to the original reform bill. When the time came to vote, and the administration began to distribute the ballot sheets to those members on the floor, Kitamura, former head of the *Chiiki Kōzō Kenkyūkai*, demanded that the vote be made by a show of hands instead, forcing everyone in the assembly to reveal their position openly. In the voting procedure, a miscount occurred and the members of the assembly were forced to vote a second time.

Keiichi Takeuchi, then president of the JAEG, regarded this constitutional reform as merely for the sake of feasibility and efficiency in administering the JAEG. Yet the result of the election held in autumn of 1999 under the new constitution proved the contrary. The outcome was "certainly very disappointing, although by now expected" (Smith, 2000). Most of the older economic geographers active since the 1960s and 70s, outside the *Chiiki Kōzō* faction, and who had served as JAEG councillors for many years, lost their seats almost across the board. Also defeated were critical geographers of the younger generation, who were working in close collaboration with international scholars for critical economic geography and had been trying hard to establish a solid foundation of global critical economic geography in Japan. A group of handpicked *Chiiki Kōzō* faction allies now forms the executive board with Yada, who was an incumbent member of the principal council of the National Land Agency, a government body, as the president.

With the undemocratic and neo-liberal turns made in parallel, the JAEG shook off its past heritage of critical economic geography and positioned itself in the role of a 'regional service class' (Lovering, 1999: 390) for neo-liberal local states and the conservative national government with vested interests. There has, on the other hand, been a constant trickle of geographers who once practised along the critical line quitting the JAEG, including Nohara, who was the co-editor of *The Regional Structure of Post-war Japanese Capitalism* together with Moritaki.

Action was also taken to remove the JAEG secretariat from the Hitotsubashi campus, where the JAEG

had kept its office for more than two decades, to a more conservative teachers' college. President Takeuchi and Matsubara openly claimed that this move was meant to distance the JAEG secretariat from the place where criticism against the neo-liberal and undemocratic turns of the JAEG took place (a motive quite geographical indeed!). To facilitate this move, the JAEG library at Hitotsubashi, which held books and periodicals donated to the JAEG in the past, was forced to shut down, and the members now no longer have access to this literature.

Ever since then, the JAEG has been snuggling up to academic circles pursuing Krugman-type neo-classical economic geography and Michael Porter's concept of industrial clusters, simply leaving the critical heritage behind. Oda (1999: p. 91), for example, cited in his review a number of economists, including neo-classical ones, who had been rejected by Kawashima forty-four years before, for their contribution in identifying the state-of-the-art research agenda of industrial clustering. He also quoted a recent government measure for clustered industries enacted in 1997, without placing them within the context of the crisis that broke out in Bangkok that same year. Nevertheless, few scholars in economics or business fields showed interest in the JAEG, let alone joined the JAEG as members. The membership of the JAEG has stagnated at around 800 for six years since the 'constitutional reform' took place. Oda deplored the fact that the works of economic geography had been neglected by scholars in business administration. No doubt not many scholars in the field would find academic merit in economic geography conducting idiographic rehashes.

The attempts to associate the JAEG with the local policy makers further continued, by inviting them to present papers at JAEG divisional meetings. In the New Regionalism, "the policy tail is wagging the analytical dog and wagging it so hard indeed that much of the theory is shaken out." (Lovering, 1999: p. 390).

Lately, the journal *AAEG* no longer attracts articles of critical import. Most of the papers published there are methodologically of a conventional and descriptive nature, rarely addressing problems of contemporary capitalism and paying little attention to the global stream of critical geography.

While the global academic circle of economic geography "has been the scene of a constantly changing parade of theoretical and empirical pursuits combined with virtually ever-present debate and controversy" (Scott, 2000: 33), the JAEG, once the first camp of critical geographers on the globe, 'free and lively criticism' was choked off with the *chiiki kōzō ron* that sat on the throne as its 'unofficial orthodoxy'.

## **VIII. Toward Resurrection of the Critical Heritage in Japan as an Integral Part of the Global Community of Critical Geographers**

Sucking itself into an isolated pigeonhole of national geography, Japanese economic geography in close association with the JAEG has been relegated to 'self-imposed isolation' from the global community of critical geographers.

There was not one single member of the JAEG executive officers presenting a paper at the Global Conference on Economic Geography, held at Singapore National University in December 2000, where more than 200 leading economic geographers convened from over 30 different countries to review the achievements of economic geography in the last century and to identify a research agenda for the 21st century.

This reality contrasts clearly with Yada's wishful self-image of his own *chiiki kōzō ron*. In a recent discussion on "contemporary economic geography and *chiiki kōzō ron*," he put together a chart titled "the principal theories of economic geography in the world" (2000: pp. 287-288). Along its 'spatial axis' he began with 'aspatial' Marx, Daniel Bell and Freeman, then 'the spatial system of world economy' by

Wallerstein and Lipietz, continuing on to 'spatial system of informational economy' by Pred and Castells, 'spatial system of corporate economy' by Massey, Schamp, and Porter, as well as 'spatial system of regional economy' by Scott and Marks; and culminated the whole list with the geographer who put forward "the spatial system of national economy and its restructuring": T. Yada himself. The chart leaves an impression with Japanese readers that *chiiki kōzō ron* is one of the world's most prominent theories of economic geography. Idolatry and ossification have come to their extreme.

Amidst this ossification and isolation from the global geographers' circle prevailing among Japanese geographers, there emerged attempts, if sporadic, to gear Japanese critical geography to the global community.

The initial attempt of this kind began with a group studying Peet's *Radical Geography* in the late 1970s led by Aono, who later became one of the candidates in the JAEG presidential election in 1999 and lost out to Yada by a wide margin. By the end of the 1990s, major works of Harvey and Scott had been translated into Japanese, including *Social Justice and the City*, *The Urbanization of Capital*, *Metropolis*, and "Monument and Myth." A book presenting a comprehensive dialectic between society and space was published (Mizuoka, 1992).

New cores of critical geographers are emerging from the ashes of demise lately. One of these is a study commission of the AJG, 'Critical Geography: Society, Economy and Space.' These commissions began in 1994 when 'The Theories and Tasks of Social Geography,' headed by Takatsu, served an instrumental role in inviting David Lay, Harvey and Scott to either the JAEG or AJG annual conferences. The members of the commission now work in close alliance with the ICGG, EARCAG (the East Asian Regional Conferences in Alternative Geography, a regional affiliate of the ICGG) and the People's Geography Project of the US to propagate critical geography now practised globally among Japanese geographers and other social scientists. A national research grant, headed by Mizuuchi, has recently been another core for the development of critical geography in Japan. With this grant he edits two journals entitled *Space, Society, and Geographical Thought* and *Japanese Contributions to the History of Geographical Thought*. The former, published in Japanese, contains original articles by Japanese geographers and translations of critical works published in foreign languages, whereas the latter publishes original articles in English to introduce works by Japanese geographers to their overseas colleagues. As the titles suggest, activities under the grant originally had an informal association with the IGU Commission on 'History of Geographical Thought,' yet the research carried out with this research grant, including sub-groups initiated by younger critical geographers, has transformed the nature of the grant into an instrument providing a more solid financial and institutional foundation for Japanese critical geographers working in the global context.

Amidst the countercurrents of contentious vectors towards the neo-liberal and the critical in geography, consciously critical geographers in Japan are now striving hard in promoting a critical orientation in geography, this time in close association with the global development of critical geography, and at various academic frontiers in honest and robust ways.

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Earlier drafts of this chapter were presented at the AAG Annual Meeting in Hawaii in March 1999 and at the Global Conference on Economic Geography in December 2000. The author is much indebted to his international colleagues, some of them remaining anonymous, who kindly offered valuable comments to improve these drafts, although he is solely responsible for the contents of this paper.